

# DUXBURY ART ASSOCIATION 1917-1975

By The Rev. Canon Bradford Burnham

In 1917, a meeting of Duxbury artists and those interested in art was held at the home of Charles Bittinger and the Duxbury Art Association was formed. The town was fortunate in having as a summer resident Winthrop Coffin, who proved to be a true patron of the arts. He offered to underwrite an exhibition of paintings. Present at the original meeting was Miss Margaret Fitzhugh Browne, who assumed the office of secretary. In the new organization, the secretary does practically all of the work. Others who attended were the Misses Marjorie and Esther Conant (Marjorie Conant later became Mrs. Bush-Brown); Waldo Kennard; Mrs. Charles Clark; William H. Walker and Everett Warner.

The first art exhibit was held at Partridge Academy the summer of 1917. The exhibit displayed not only paintings by local artists but also some borrowed works by artists from Lyme, Conn.; Cacicine, Long Island, and the Guild of Boston Artists. This show was so successful and well received by the community and the art critics, that it encouraged the artists to follow it with other exhibitions.

In this first exhibition, Bittinger showed a painting entitled "Livery of the Palace at Ver-

sailles." The painting was later purchased for the permanent collection of the City Art Museum of St. Louis.

In those days Bittinger was an active member of the National Academy of Design in New York. He ran the Duxbury shows somewhat along the lines of a closed exhibition with a jury to select the paintings to be hung and to award prizes. A nationally-known painter himself, he knew most of the leading artists of the day and persuaded many of them to bring pictures to the Second Duxbury Exhibition.

In 1918, this show included works by John Singer Sargent, Charles H. Woodbury, Irving R. Wiles, and Frank W. Benson.

A number of painters from Lyme, Conn., came to the preview. The Association also sponsored a special exhibition of Marine pictures and Ship Portraits which were all owned by local people. To this exhibition, Charles Dwinnell lent his collection of ship models.

## Long History

The Duxbury art exhibitions have had an almost continuous life since their conception. However, after the Partridge Hall burned down, the paintings were hung in Old Town Hall each year except for the period during

World War II. After World War II the Rev. Abbot Peterson revived the annual exhibition, adding to it an exhibition of crafts and also sculpture. At that time the Association became entirely a local effort, with no outside invitations. It was largely made up of amateur artists and craftsmen, strengthened by a small group of professionals, including Madame E. Weber-Fulop, Mrs. Marjorie Bush-Brown, Frank Rogers and Mrs. Marjorie Andrews. In reviving the Art Association, Mr. Peterson had the backing of the energetic Charles Bittinger; Robert Walker, who was the son of the famous cartoonist of *Life*, William H. Walker; and himself, the head of the Art Department at Swarthmore. To this group of men, Robert Vose Jr. of Vose Galleries in Boston, added his great knowledge and energy. To the exhibitions, Mr. Peterson also added a series of summer lectures for members of the Association.

#### Lecturers

The first 3 lecturers were Messrs. Bittinger, Walker and Vose. The Rev. Peterson resigned as president of the Association in 1953 and his office was taken by Robert Walker. It is interesting to note that at the time of the art exhibition in the summer of 1952 an innovation was made, namely, a prize of \$100 to be known as the Abbot Peterson Prize, was to be given on results of a popular vote taken from the members of the Art Association to the best picture in the Exhibition.

Also, a \$50 prize was given for a tray judged to be the best in the exhibit. It was decided in the summer of 1954 to have the annual exhibition open on Aug. 15 and stay open for a week. John Cutler was in charge of publicity and Robert Walker arranged the show itself. Much general local interest was aroused. Almost 1,000 people attended the show. At the tea on the opening day, those attending were asked to vote by ballot on the most interesting picture. The first prize was then given to Mrs. E. Weber-Fulop's painting of a "detailed interior," and the second prize went to Janet Faunce's portrait of Meg Cutler.

A third prize was given to Mrs. Russell McIntosh for a 19' by 12' hooked rug, which was one of the most popular exhibits.

#### More Shows

During the following year, 1955, besides the annual summer exhibition, 4 interesting talks were given. The first was given by Leo Prince of Duxbury and was titled "Has Modern Art Come to Stay?" Then a few weeks later, there was a lecture on "Flying Saucers" by one of the Harvard professors. A lecture followed by Arthur Heintzelman, N.A., on "Principles of Composition." Then, finally, on Oct. 29, a visit and a talk was given at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston by Eleanor Randall of the Museum staff. The lecture was on printing demonstration and that ended a very interesting season for the Art Association.

At the annual meeting that year, the question of an art scholarship for deserving and well-recommended graduates was discussed. Dr. Everett Handy, school superintendent in Duxbury, gave his opinion on the matter and it was decided by the Association to recommend that the Association give a \$100 scholarship. This was done and the scholarship went to Olga Johnson, who planned to attend the Massachusetts School of Art the following year.

During 1956-57, the president of the Association was Robert M. Walker and vice president Cecil Atwater. Atwater later became president.

He, as everybody remembers, was one of the great photographic artists of that time. During the year, besides the artists' exhibition, which was held in Old Town Hall beginning on Aug. 6 and running through Aug. 12, there were several lectures, one of them by Stanley Woodard, one of the outstanding marine artists at Rockport. Then Eleanor Randall, senior lecturer of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, talked on "Early American Houses and Their Furnishings." Later in the spring, a lecture on "The Art of Our Time" was given by Miss Dorothy Adlow, art critic for the *Christian Science Monitor*.

The annual art exhibition was this year under the direction of Robinson Murray, who continued to be from this time on one of the real supporters of the art work in Duxbury. Further information about that exhibition may be of interest. There were 93 paintings, drawings, etchings and photographs on display. In addition, there were more than 40 examples of arts and crafts and of sculpture. All of these exhibits were the work of more than 60 of Duxbury's busy creative residents.

The *Duxbury Clipper* that year reported the following: "In addition to our enthusiastic amateurs in the arts and crafts, our community is fortunate to have among its residents a surprising number of serious and wellknown professional artists. The more than a thousand visitors to the show this summer seemed surprised that the average standard of the exhibitions was so high."

At the time of the exhibit in 1957, from Aug. 5 to the 11th, when Atwater was president of the Art Association, a new addition was made to the exhibit. A special group of drawings by the high school art students was added to the many paintings in the exhibit. The work of the art students was well received and it was recommended that this feature be continued as part of the annual exhibit.

In the spring of 1958, Robinson Murray was elected president of the Art Association. One of the new and interesting activities which he added to the work of the Association was a "Work Night." Work Night was to be held in Old Town Hall. All members of the Art Association who wished could come and draw or paint in any medium that they desired. Both a model and a still life were set up for those who wished to paint from one or the other. Furthermore, professional instruction was available. Work Night was well attended by amateurs in Duxbury and much was learned from it. Murray added a further activity to the work of the Art Association. He suggested that art classes should be started. Seven persons showed an interest in doing so and, therefore, for the first time there was a meeting of a

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group of people interested in learning how to draw and to paint. This kind of activity has continued up until the present. The lecture series was continued as it had been the previous year and one of the most interesting of the lecturers was a former President of the Art Association, Cecil Atwater, whose subject was "Pictorial Photography and Its Place in the Fine Arts." Atwater showed 50 original prints of prizewinning salon photographs, including a number of his own. He explained the difference between "documentary" pictures and those taken from the standpoint of art. His explanation of the principles and processes controlling the finished print of a salon picture was fascinating and those present voted his talk one of the most interesting and instructive that the Association had enjoyed.

It might be of interest to those who are residents of Duxbury now and remember what Duxbury was 15 years ago to give a list of the committee in charge of the exhibition that summer: Mrs. H. Billings Andrews, Mrs. Cecil Atwater, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Boyer, Mrs. Richard Briggs, Mrs. Lyle Bush, Mrs. Robert Cheney, Mrs. Mable Collingswood, Miss Helen Eaton, Miss June Eldridge, Miss Margaret Elliott, Mrs. Roscoe Elliott, Mrs. Maxwell Fish, Mrs. John Hathaway, Mrs. Charles Hayes, Mr. and Mrs. Willard Hicks, Mrs. Gordon Jameson, Mrs. Edward Leonard, Mrs. Harry McDuffy, Professor and Mrs. William Mautsby, Mrs. William Powell, Mrs. Malcolm Robinson, Mrs. Lloyd Salt, Miss Genevieve Thomas, Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Wiggin, Mrs. Benjamin Goodrich, Mrs. Robert Fox, Mrs. Sylvester Kelley, Mrs. McIntosh, Miss Sabina Marshall, and Mrs. Robert Seymour. Quite a list of people, isn't it? They were all interested in the Art Association here in Duxbury 15 years ago.

### Schedule

From what has been said before, one can see there is a regular schedule of events each year which is followed by the Art Association. It is interesting to note how many excellent artists came to Duxbury during these

years to lecture most interestingly. In February of 1959, Rutledge Bate, the distinguished portrait painter with the Vesper George School of Art, gave a splendid demonstration of portrait painting, using for his model our good member, William Mautsby. Then, on May 25, Mrs. Thomas Woodhouse, curator of education at the Rhode Island School of Design, took members on a color slide trip through the school's Museum of Art, featuring the latest acquisitions of that institution. On July 13, 1959, Mrs. Sylvia Tryon gave a lecture on the romance of Canterbury Cathedral. The Duxbury Art Association scholarship went that year to Miss Mary Kehoe, a member of the graduating class of Duxbury High School. She planned to attend the Rhode Island School of Design that coming Fall.

At the annual meeting in the Fall of 1959, the following persons were elected as officers of the Association for 1960: President, Dr. Sidney Wiggin; vice president, Richard Briggs; secretary, Dr. James Peters; treasurer, Miss Margaret Atwood.

At the beginning of 1960, Ture Bengtz, who later became one of the fine artists resident in the town of Duxbury and also head of the Art Complex, lectured to the Association in Duxbury. His subject was "Space on a Two-Dimensional Surface." During his talk, he spoke on the problem of portraying our 3-dimensional world on a 2-dimensional canvas. It is interesting to read about the career of Bengtz as it was reported in the *Duxbury Clipper*.

He was born in Finland and came to the U.S. in 1927. He studied in his own country and at the Boston Museum School, where he was head of the drawing and graphic arts department.

He won the Page Travelling Scholarship which enabled him to continue his studies in England, Holland, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. His varied work included oil, water color, gouache, etching, lithography and cante crayon. His work has been shown in many art centers, including the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Academy.

In 1946 he won first prize in the New England Competition sponsored

by the Stewart Gallery. In 1914, a marine painting, "Viking," brought him the Palmer Memorial Prize at the National Academy of Design. Other awards included honorable mention from the Society of American Etchers in 1947.

In 1944, he won grants to study at the Tiffany Foundation. Since Bengtz has been such a splendid citizen of our town, such a list of his great work certainly is appropriate in this history of the Art Association.

Early in 1960 Dr. Wiggin arranged for an art expert to speak. He was Russell Smith, head of the school at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and head of the Tufts College art department. He spoke on the subject of "The Background of Contemporary Painting."

A few months later a noted sculptor spoke to the Art Association, Bashka Paeff. She showed how to create a portrait head in modeling clay and the methods used in sculpture; and her work was extraordinarily well received by a large Duxbury audience. Mrs. Paeff was the creator of the popular bronze statue of the kneeling boy with the bird which stands in the fountain in the Public Gardens.

That year the annual exhibition of Arts and Crafts was held in Old Town Hall beginning about the 7th and continuing through the 14th, with entries of pictures and art objects numbering over 200. About 2,000 persons visited the exhibit that year.

Dr. Wiggin was elected at the annual meeting of 1960 for a second term as president. Vice president-elect was Marjorie Andrews; secretary, Dr. James Peters, treasurer Thomas Reynolds.

In November of 1960 an interesting lecture was given by Robert Dart on Chinese Art. Dart is on the staff of the Museum of Fine Arts and its Department of Asiatic Art. His lecture included a description of bronzes, sculpture, painting and ceramics in Chinese art history.

In the spring of 1961, Leo Prince, of the Museum of Fine Arts, and of Duxbury, discussed "Basic Design and Structure in Painting," presenting the principles which underline the design of a painting and illustrating his

talk with slides of traditional and modern paintings.

At the annual meeting that summer the following persons were elected for the ensuing year: President Dr. James Peters; vice president, Mrs. H. Billings Andrews; secretary, Mrs. Donald Stanbro; treasurer, Mrs. George Hammond.

Following the meeting, Professor Robert Walker, chairman of the fine arts department at Swarthmore College, and a past president of the Duxbury Art Association, spoke on "Sculpture and the Art of Creation."

Following Dr. Peters election, the first lecture of his term of office was conducted by Sidney Stewart, an authority on antiques. Stewart discussed early American antiques from the late 17th to the early 19th century, incorporating in his talk actual examples of antique heirlooms, furniture and accessories to illustrate his talk.

After the term of Dr. Peters as president, Robinson Murray was elected, since 1963, for his second term as president. Vice president at that time was Francis Park III; secretary, Mrs. Robert MacCallum; treasurer, Mrs. George Hammond.

Following the second term of office of Robinson Murray, Francis Park III was elected president of the association and continued in office until 1965. At that time The Rev. Richard Hasty, minister of the First Parish Church in Duxbury, was elected president.

Vice president was Marshall Joyce; secretary, Mrs. Ernest Jones; treasurer, Mrs. George Hammond.

Under the direction of the president, it was decided that the Art Association should lease for the former home of the Duxbury Historical Society, Drew House, to be the home of the Art Association. Up until that time the Association had never had a headquarters, but now that the Drew House was to be theirs, increased interest in the arts and in the classes which the Art Association would sponsor obviously became apparent. A class in watercolor was taught by Marshall Joyce, one of the finest watercolorers in our community. Art classes were begun under the direction of President Hasty.

Mr. Hasty was elected again in 1966 and under his direction there was a great increase in the number of classes held at Drew House. Mrs. Frederic Clifford became chairman of the classes. Besides the instruction given the classes in art, there were educational evenings conducted by individuals who were fine educators in art.

In February of that year an innovation was introduced, an excellent combination called the "Collectors Show," which consisted of many of the finest paintings owned by the residents of Duxbury which were loaned to

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the Art Association for an exhibition. In connection with the exhibition, 2 lectures were held: first by Mrs. Kenneth Wakefield, who spoke on her collection of Sandwich Glass, and the second lecture by Mr. Patrick Dudensing, who spoke on the art of collecting.

The following year Mrs. Frederic Clifford was elected for the term 1967-1968 as president. Vice president was William Hearn; secretary, Mrs. Daniel Sangster; treasurer, Mrs. Thomas Jones. That year proved to be one of extraordinary growth and development for the Association; with a base of operation it was found that interest and correspondingly greater attendance continued in all of the classes. The objective of the classes was to broaden the lives of the community's children by involving them in visual arts, and also give an opportunity to the adults to learn more about painting and sculpture.

During the year there were 3 catered dinner-movie evenings at Drew House. Also a special exhibit of early American portraits was shown, with entries collected from 28 families in Duxbury.

Following Mrs. Clifford, the next president of the Art Association was John Weld. Under his direction Mrs. Sabina Crosby was asked to be executive secretary of the Art Association. As the president said, this was a fortunate choice. She was able to give to the Association a real sense of continuity and took a great deal of the burden of running the association off of the shoulders of the many volunteers. That year 2 sections of childrens' classes were conducted during the fall and winter under the direction of Mrs. Allan Eaton and Mrs. Robert Ross, together with

Miss Gay Youse. A group of adults studied under the direction of Marshall Joyce who had his classes filled both during the winter and spring terms. During the spring a second art exhibit was established in Drew House. Members of the association submitted 50 paintings, from which 5 were selected for showing at the Brockton Art Center that spring. The annual exhibit was held that year beginning on Aug. 2 under the direction of Mrs. Bradford Jenkins and Mrs. Barbara Robinson.

When it was necessary for Weld to resign the office of president because of leaving town, The Rev. Bradford Burnham was elected president; Mrs. Daniel Sangster, vice president; Mrs. Barbara Robinson, secretary and Mrs. Malcolm McNaught, treasurer. Mrs. Crosby continued as executive secretary and under her loyal work the classes for children and for adults were excellent.

With the primary group which met on Wednesday afternoons, there were 12 sessions. The instructor was Mrs. Georgia Blackmore. The intermediate group (grades 5 through 10) met on Tuesdays, instructed by Miss Virginia Eaton. The crewel class was led by Mrs. Clorinda Banks. The painting class which met on Wednesdays was taught by Marshall Joyce. All these classes were limited to 15.

At a dinner meeting held at Drew House that winter, Joyce painted a watercolor.

The Rev. Cannon Burnham continued as president for 3 years. In the last year of his presidency, the annual art exhibit held in the summertime was moved to one of the boat sheds in Snug Harbor. An extensive program of entertainment was arranged for both young people and adults in the boat shed on each of the afternoons of the exhibit. The entertainment ended

on Saturday evening with a dance. During each winter season, dinners were held once a month at Drew House. Each dinner was followed by a lecture on art. When it was necessary in 1973 for Mrs. Crosby to resign as executive secretary, Mrs. Jane Freeberg was elected to take her place.

In the fall of 1973, following the resignation of the Rev. Mr. Burnham, Mrs. Linda Allen was elected president of the Association. Shortly thereafter Mrs. Marsden Earle became executive secretary. Under the leadership of Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Earle, a close relationship has been established with the other art organizations in town. Art lectures have been held at both the Duxbury Art Complex and the Helen Bumpus Gallery under joint auspices and a juried spring show was held at the Complex in 1974. One of the first and most interesting lectures was given by Mr. Frank Rogers on the subject of expressionist painting. Other lectures were to follow and the close cooperation between the organizations is to continue.

The Art Association, now in its 58th year, promises to have an excellent future as it has had such a splendid past.